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The Gaza War and India–Israel Relations: Strategic Partnership, Diplomatic Balancing and Regional Implications

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Abstract:

The horrific and brutal attack by Hamas on Israel on October 7, 2023 and the subsequent war in Gaza led to a significant transformation in West Asian politics, creating geopolitical and humanitarian consequences. The Gaza war crisis provided a new diplomatic challenge for India, which has built a comprehensive strategic partnership with Israel while simultaneously held long-standing support for the Palestinian demands and close ties with Arab states. Against this backdrop, the present study assesses the impact of the Gaza War on India–Israel relations and examines India's measures to balance competing strategic, political and economic interests in the wider region. This research paper adopts a qualitative approach based on secondary sources such as government documents, official statements by diplomats and scholarly literature, the paper suggests that the conflict has not changed the core trajectory of India–Israel relations. India has successfully maintained strategic autonomy while adopting a balanced diplomatic approach to preserve its broader interests in West Asia. The study finds that defence cooperation, technological collaboration and counterterrorism convergence between both nations continue to underpin bilateral relations, whereas India's long held traditional support for two-state solution and humanitarian assistance reflects its diplomatic balancing. The paper concludes that India's response to the Gaza crisis reflects the significance of strategic autonomy in formulation of its foreign policy and highlights the challenges New Delhi confronts in a hostile and volatile region.

Keywords: Diplomatic balancing, Gaza War, India–Israel relations, Strategic autonomy, Strategic partnership, West Asia.

1. Introduction:

The Gaza War following the attack by Hamas on Israel on 7 October 2023 exhibits one of the most significant developments in West Asian politics in recent years. Earlier Israel was caught napping on October 6, 1973, when Syria and Egypt attacked it during Yom Kippur day. The conflict not only

made worse the long-standing Israel–Palestine conflict but also paved the way for wider geopolitical repercussions, disturbed regional stability, diplomacy and the strategic calculations of major global powers (Kugiel, 2023). As the humanitarian crisis in Gaza intensified, India with wider interests in the region faced the challenge of balancing their strategic ties with Israel and economic considerations towards Arabs.

India occupies a unique and distinct space in this rapidly changing landscape. Since the establishment of full- fledged diplomatic ties with Israel in 1992, India and Israel have developed a comprehensive strategic partnership encompassing in its fold defence, agriculture, horticulture science and technology and cybersecurity cooperation and greater degree of convergence in counterterrorism operations (Ministry of External Affairs [MEA], 2023a). This bilateral relationship attained a greater momentum and thrust and witnessed significant expansion during the BJP government (Kumaraswamy, 2010). But India has maintained continuous, traditional and explicit support for the Palestinian people's rights and has consistently advocated a negotiated two-state solution where both state can live side by side and peacefully (MEA, 2023b). Moreover, New Delhi's huge dependence on Gulf countries, particularly in matters of energy imports such as oil and gas and large Indian diaspora in West Asia have forced it to conduct a balanced and pragmatic approach towards the region (Pant & Joshi, 2017).

The Gaza War posed a new set of diplomatic challenges for India. India condemned the terrorist attack by Hamas on Israel in unequivocal and strongest terms and expressed sympathy with the victims. Further, it also emphasized the need for humanitarian assistance, respect for international law and the dialogues and negotiation as a means to achieve a peaceful resolution of the conflict (MEA, 2023c). This dual approach suggests India's attempt to reconcile its strategic partnership with Israel while maintaining simultaneous commitment to the just and reasonable demands of Palestinians and to protect its wider interests in the Arab world (Kugiel, 2023).

Existing literature on India–Israel ties have mainly discussed the historical aspects of bilateral relationship, defence cooperation and the shift in India's West Asia policy in the post-Cold War period (Kumaraswamy, 2010; Singh, 2021) while the implications of the Gaza War for the India–Israel relations and the broader dimensions of India's diplomatic interactions in the region got limited scholarly attention. This research article seeks to analyse and comprehend how the Gaza conflict has direct bearing on India's relations with Israel and assess to what extent New Delhi has maintained strategic continuity while pursuing diplomatic balancing in this conflict-ridden region.

The study argues that despite the foreign policy compulsions created by the Gaza War, India–Israel relations have largely retained their strategic character. Simultaneously, India has adopted a calibrated diplomatic posture aimed at safeguarding its broader geopolitical, economic and energy interests in West Asia. By examining India's response to the crisis, the paper highlights the continuing

relevance of strategic autonomy in Indian foreign policy and explores the regional implications of New Delhi's balancing strategy.

2. Theoretical Framework and Methodology:

This research paper follows the perspective of Neorealism to analyse the closeness of India–Israel relations following the Gaza War. The core proposition of Neorealism ideology is that, the existing international system is anarchic, where national interests and security considerations are the core features for the formulation of a nation's foreign policy. (Waltz, 1979). From this perspective, India's response to the Gaza conflict can be understood as an attempt to preserve strategic interests while maintaining regional stability.

This study also emphasizes on the principle of strategic autonomy, which has been a core pillar of Indian foreign policy. Strategic autonomy is based on the notion that India will form issue based coalitions with like-minded countries without getting entangled in any military or regional blocks. (Pant & Joshi, 2017). Following the Gaza crisis, India's approach illustrates this principle through its open support for Israel's security concerns by criticizing the terrorism in its every form and manifestation and advocated two- state solution where Palestine can be an independent state within safe, secure and recognized borders.

This paper follows essentially a descriptive and qualitative approach derived from secondary sources. The analysis is primarily based on the official statements issued by the Ministry of External Affairs, parliamentary debates, policy papers and scholarly literature. The study seeks to examine continuity and change in India–Israel relations and assess the wider regional implications of the Gaza conflict.

3. Evolution of India–Israel Relations before the Gaza War:

India recognized Israel as early as in 1950 but in subsequent decades, relations remained in dormancy. India and Israel established full diplomatic relations in January 1992, marking a significant departure and transformation in India's West Asia policy. Since then, bilateral ties have grown by leaps and bounds and expanded steadily across multiple sectors, including defence, agriculture, horticulture, water conservation, science and technology, trade, culture, people to people and counterterrorism cooperation (MEA, 2023a). The end of the Cold War, USSR's disintegration, shifting sands of global politics, changing global power dynamics, Oslo Accord (1993) aimed for normalization between Israel and Palestine and India's economic liberalization proved to be decisive factors which created favourable conditions for boosting ties between the two countries (Kumaraswamy, 2010).

Defence cooperation has been the core pillar and cornerstone of the bilateral relationship between India and Israel. Israel became one of India's reliable partner and supplier, of defence equipments, providing cutting edge technologies, advanced missile systems, UAV (unarmed aerial vehicles) and surveillance capabilities. Cooperation in intelligence sharing and counterterrorism further

strengthened strategic trust between the two countries (SIPRI, 2024).

The relationship attained greater political visibility and openness after the assumption of office by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2014. Prime Minister Modi's historic maiden visit to Israel in 2017 and the subsequent visit of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to India in 2018 proved instrumental to achieve de-hyphenation in India's foreign policy vis-a-vis Israel and Palestine. It reflected the growing strategic convergence and astute diplomatic balancing between the two countries (MEA, 2017). Bilateral engagement also expanded into areas such as education, innovation, cybersecurity and agricultural technology.

Despite the upward trajectory with Israel in relationship, India consistently maintained its conventional and idealistic support for the Palestinian cause and continued to advocate a negotiated two-state solution. This approach reflected New Delhi's broader objective of maintaining balanced relations with both Israel and the Arab world (Pant & Joshi, 2017).

In recent years, new regional developments, including the Abraham Accords which normalizes ties between Israel and its Arab adversaries and the formation of the I2U2 grouping comprising India, Israel, the United Arab Emirates and the United States, further enhanced strategic cooperation and provides an institutional arrangement framework to promote ties further in West Asia (Kugiel, 2022). Consequently, by the eve of the Gaza War, India-Israel relations had evolved into a comprehensive strategic partnership characterized by strong defence cooperation, growing economic engagement and shared concerns regarding regional security.

Table 1
Major Milestones in India-Israel Relations

Year	Event	Significance
1992	Establishment of diplomatic relations	Formal beginning of bilateral ties between India and Israel
2017	Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Israel	Elevated bilateral relations to a strategic partnership
2018	Visit of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to India	Strengthened cooperation in defence, agriculture and innovation
2022	Formation of I2U2 grouping	Expanded regional cooperation involving India, Israel, UAE and the US
2023	Outbreak of the Gaza War	Tested India's diplomatic balancing in West Asia

4. India's Response to the Gaza War:

The Hamas attack on Israel on 7 October 2023 and the subsequent Israeli military operations in Gaza posed a significant diplomatic challenge for India. Given its expanding strategic partnership with Israel and its longstanding support for the Palestinian cause, New Delhi adopted and calculated risk and a carefully cautious approach aimed at preserving its broader interests in West Asia.

India condemned the attack on Israel by Hamas in strongest terms immediately without any circumlocution. Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed solidarity with Israel in their hour of grief and condemned terrorism in its every form and manifestation in unequivocal terms, reaffirming India's support for Israel during the initial phase of the conflict (Modi, 2023). This position underscored the importance India attaches to counterterrorism cooperation and its strategic relationship with Israel.

At the same time, India emphasized the respect for international laws and regulations, need for restraint, supported humanitarian assistance. The Ministry of External Affairs reiterated India's long held traditional support for a negotiated two-state solution leading to the establishment of a sovereign, independent and viable Palestinian state within a safe, secure and recognized border living peacefully alongside Israel (MEA, 2023a). India also provided humanitarian assistance to the people of Gaza, including medical supplies and relief material, demonstrating its commitment to addressing the humanitarian dimensions of the conflict (MEA, 2023b).

India's balancing strategy regarding Israel and Palestine can be witnessed through the voting pattern at the United Nations. While New Delhi condemned terrorism and supported dialogue and discussions to defuse tensions to ensure regional stability, it avoided taking an overtly partisan position and sought to maintain constructive engagement with both Israel and the Arab world. This approach was entirely consistent with India's core foreign policy feature of preserving strategic autonomy and maintaining diversified partnerships across West Asia (Kugiel, 2023).

The calibrated approach of India's foreign policy was derived from several factors, including its growing defence and technological cooperation with Israel, energy dependence on Gulf countries, the presence of a large Indian diaspora in the region and its commitment to regional stability. Rather than representing a departure from existing policy, India's response to the Gaza War highlighted the continuity of its pragmatic and interest-based approach towards West Asia.

So, the Gaza conflict did not alter the trajectory of India-Israel relations. Instead, it strengthened India's preference for walking on a tight rope to maintain balancing, enabling effective diplomatic manoeuvre by New Delhi to safeguard its strategic interests by partnership with Israel while simultaneously maintaining its traditional support for the Palestinian cause and preserving strong ties with Arab states.

Table 2

India's Response to the Gaza War

Dimension	India's Position
Terrorism	Condemned the Hamas attacks of 7 October 2023
Support for Israel	Expressed solidarity with Israel and condemned terrorism
Palestine Policy	Reaffirmed support for a two-state solution
Humanitarian Assistance	Sent medical supplies and relief material to Gaza
United Nations	Adopted a balanced and cautious diplomatic approach
Regional Strategy	Maintained strategic autonomy and engagement with both Israel and Arab states

5. Strategic Partnership and Defence Cooperation:

Despite the instability caused by the Gaza War, defence cooperation has remained the cornerstone of India-Israel ties and has shown resiliency. Israel has become one of India's main defence partners over the last thirty years, providing cutting-edge military technologies, missile systems, unmanned aerial vehicles, and surveillance equipment (SIPRI, 2024). The two nations' strategic confidence has been further reinforced by their shared worries about terrorism and regional security. In addition to arms shipments, the defence relationship is distinguished by growing collaboration in research, technology, and intelligence sharing. India's defensive capabilities have been improved by systems like the Barak missile defence system, Heron drones, and numerous radar and electronic warfare technology (Kumaraswamy, 2010). Counterterrorism cooperation, which gained significant boost particularly after the Mumbai attacks of 2008, has remained an important dimension of bilateral relations.

Cooperation has spread beyond defence to include digital technologies, agriculture, water management, cybersecurity, and innovation. The strategic partnership's reach has expanded with the creation of Centers of Excellence in agriculture and cooperation in fields including artificial intelligence, start-up ecosystems, and water conservation (MEA, 2023a). These changes show how bilateral engagement is becoming more all-encompassing.

These areas of collaboration have not been severely affected by the Gaza War. Both nations have maintained frequent diplomatic engagement and strategic communication despite divergent views on the crisis on a global scale. India's humanitarian assistance to Gaza victims and support for Israel's

security concerns have allowed New Delhi to maintain the pace of bilateral relations without becoming overly polarised (Kugiel, 2023).

Moreover, emerging regional frameworks such as I2U2 have provided additional avenues for cooperation in trade, technology, infrastructure and food security. These initiatives indicate that India–Israel relations are no longer confined to traditional security concerns but have evolved into a broader strategic partnership with economic and geopolitical dimensions (Pant & Joshi, 2017).

Therefore, the Gaza War has demonstrated the resilience and maturity of India–Israel relations. Rather than weakening bilateral ties, the crisis has highlighted the strategic significance both countries attach to their partnership. The continuity of defence cooperation and expanding engagement in non-traditional sectors suggest that India–Israel relations are likely to remain an important component of India's wider West Asia policy.

6. Diplomatic Balancing and Regional Implications:

The complexities of India's relationship with West Asia was highlighted once more by the Gaza War. In addition to denouncing terrorism and reiterating its support for a negotiated two-state solution, India also highlighted humanitarian issues and reaffirmed its strategic cooperation with Israel (MEA, 2023a). This strategy demonstrated New Delhi's attempt to strike a balance between its long-standing political and economic interests in the Arab world and its developing connections with Israel. India's balancing approach is influenced by a number of factors. In addition to housing a sizable Indian diaspora and being a significant economic partner, the Gulf region continues to be a vital source of energy supplies. Therefore, maintaining stable ties with nations like Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar continues to be a key goal of Indian foreign policy (Pant & Joshi, 2017).

India's humanitarian assistance to Gaza and its support for international efforts aimed at reducing civilian suffering demonstrated its intention to avoid alienating Arab partners while sustaining cooperation with Israel (MEA, 2023b).

At the diplomatic level, India has sought to maintain an independent position by avoiding excessive alignment with any particular bloc. This strategy is in line with the idea of strategic autonomy, which enables New Delhi to protect its national interests while pursuing issue-based collaborations. This larger foreign policy stance was mirrored in India's voting behaviour at the UN and its appeals for peaceful resolution and discussion (Kugiel, 2023).

Beyond the current fighting, the Gaza War has regional ramifications. Long-term instability in West Asia may have a negative impact on trade routes, connectivity projects like the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), and energy security. Similarly, if geopolitical tensions worsen, new frameworks like I2U2 can encounter difficulties. However, India has a lot of diplomatic leeway thanks to its varied interactions with Israel, the Gulf states, and other regional players.

Overall, India's response to the Gaza War confirms the pragmatic orientation in its West Asia

policy. Rather than choosing between competing partners, New Delhi has sought to protect its strategic interests through a balanced approach derived from its strategic autonomy. This policy has enabled India to preserve its relations with Israel while simultaneously maintaining constructive engagement with the Arab world and enhancing its role as an emerging global actor.

7. Conclusion:

The Gaza War has emerged as one of the most significant geopolitical developments in West Asia in recent years, posing complex diplomatic and strategic challenges for states with diverse interests in the region. India had to carefully balance its long-standing support for the Palestinian cause, its growing strategic cooperation with Israel, and its larger political and economic interests in the Arab world as a result of the conflict.

The analysis concludes that the course of India-Israel ties has not been significantly changed by the Gaza War. The solid foundation of defence cooperation, technology cooperation, counterterrorism coordination, and expanding economic involvement has continued to support bilateral ties. Despite the uncertainty brought forth by the conflict, these elements have helped the strategic alliance remain resilient. The significance of the relationship is highlighted by India's unwavering denunciation of terrorism and its ongoing cooperation with Israel. However, India's handling of the situation has shown that it is practical and well-rounded. New Delhi has attempted to protect its broader regional interests by promoting humanitarian aid, endorsing a two-state solution, and keeping strong ties with Arab nations. The continued applicability of strategic autonomy as a tenet of Indian foreign policy is seen in this calibrated approach. India has made an effort to keep positive ties with all of the important players in West Asia rather than siding solely with one group. The crisis has also brought attention to how complicated India's involvement in the region is becoming. India's West Asia policy has taken on new dimensions due to concerns about trade, energy security, the welfare of the Indian diaspora, and new connectivity plans like the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor. Consequently, regional stability remains crucial for the realization of India's long-term strategic and economic objectives.

In conclusion, the Gaza War has reinforced rather than weakened the strategic character of India-Israel relations. Simultaneously, it has demonstrated India's ability to pursue diplomatic balancing in an increasingly polarized international environment. As geopolitical competition and regional uncertainties continue to shape West Asia, India's policy is likely to remain guided by pragmatism, strategic autonomy and the pursuit of national interests. The future of India-Israel relations will therefore depend not only on bilateral dynamics but also on the evolving regional order and India's capacity to adapt to changing geopolitical realities.

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